

Seniors *from A1*

allowed to visit, only recently has the facility begun accepting new residents from private residences and hospitals — and even in those cases only under certain circumstances.

“What we’re requiring is a 10-day temperature check that needs to be sent to us virtually so we can see what the temperatures are over a whole 10-day process,” said Greco. “There is a screening criteria, so once those things are followed ... we can move forward and get an assessment done from our nurse.”

Coupled with strict guidelines, those living at home who need assisted or memory care can receive help from the facility. However, Greco laments that the process has become much more impersonal as the center has switched to virtual tours and video assessments.

“It really takes that feel of that communal part away from touring communities, which we love doing,” she said. “So we have to really rely on the virtual part of it, which is hard. ... It’s become very at arms-length going forward in the way we’re doing business and allowing [new] residents to enter.”

While the heavy restrictions are keep the community physically safe, psychological health is also an ingredient that must be taken under consideration.

“Right now, our greatest concern is our residents and making sure they have enough to thrive with activities and Zoom conversations with families,” said Greco.

Keeping residents’ spirits up is task well on the forefront of the “new normal”

inside senior living facilities and in-person interactions have understandably been a popular means to that end in the form of window visits.

“It really brightens their day, for sure,” said Greco.

Window visits allow families to communicate with facility residents through the first-floor apartment windows, some using whiteboards to write messages.

The visitation technique has become something of a trend nationwide and has also become popular at Magnolia Gardens Senior Living.

“We have quite a few that do window visits,” said Tara Blount, executive director at Magnolia Gardens. “But even when they have their window open to chat, we’re still asking that they are wearing masks.”

Blount acknowledged these visits as an essential element of the residents’ thriving amid the lockdown.

“Every day is different for us right now and we’re just trying to minimize the impact that it has on our residents — trying to keep them engaged and spend time with them as much as we can,” she said. “Social isolation for seniors is critical. It can be a leading cause of depression. It’s failure to thrive for them.”

Magnolia Gardens, too, shut its doors as the coronavirus spread became imminent.

“It kind of came in baby steps and before we knew it, it was a full closure,” said Blount.

Currently, just essential health care personnel are let in and family members are allowed in only if a resident is actively dying.

All employees must take a temperature check

at the entrance and also go through a Centers for Disease Control-based screening, meaning they are questioned about travel, contacts and if they’ve had any symptoms. Residents, too, have a once-a-day minimum temperature check and screening.

Inside the facility, social activities such as communal dining have ended and residents have had to adjust to eating meals alone.

“The overall isolation has been the biggest impact,” said Blount about Magnolia Gardens’ residents. “Thursday lunch with their kids was one of the biggest events of the week for them; just as much as being able to go to the salon or take their animal to the vet.”

On top of that, staff have been hustling about town to run errands for the residents. A basic run to the pharmacy, for example, is no longer a part of a resident’s routine.

“We’ve asked our residents to please let us handle those for them right now, because it’s safer for us to go out into the community than it is for them,” Blount said.

Though both facilities report staff that have adjusted well to the new conditions, there is still a palpable toll on workers who have added concerns outside the job.

With school out of session and babysitters and daycare hard to come by, single parents in particular have had it rough.

“As well as knowing every day they’re coming to work in a high-risk environment and then potentially bringing it home to their family because they have to pay the bills,” Blount added.

One employee even resigned over concern the

coronavirus was going to hit senior living, she said.

Among residents, Blount said there had been some mixed feelings at first to the new adjustments to daily living and, moreover, the lack of agency afforded to residents has meant a kind of isolation within isolation for some.

The novel situation has necessitated creative responses.

Middlefield Oaks, for instance, recently conducted a “Grant-A-Wish Senior Day” in which residents sent wishes for an outside gift to the community.

“The outpouring was — I’ve never seen anything like it,” Greco said. “The community in Cottage Grove ... they fulfilled every single one of our residents’ wishes. Puppy visits, cakes, cookies, bottles of gin, olive oil, Greek food, you name it. And the gifts just keep pouring in and it’s fantastic to see.”

Though so many daily interactions now involve the impersonal barriers of masks, gloves and gowns, Greco said creative activities such as these have helped tremendously with everyone’s adaptation.

“With such a negative situation that we find ourselves in, it’s made us so much closer,” she said. “The stories ... are more of gratitude than anything in the negative because we’re trying to give our residents the same way of living, if you will.”

While the senior living centers have found ways to manage the public health crisis for now, the future remains uncertain as the facilities will be following the guidance of public health authorities in regards to any reopening strategies.

“But as far as our full building being able to

open, and have public access again, I’m pretty confident that the senior living homes — we’re going to be the very last to be able to open again,” said Blount.

Looking to the future, Greco said she is cautiously optimistic about again embracing the social aspects of her job.

“I think we as a community and as a society have to be hopeful,” she said. “But it’s also making sure that just because some things have lax, we are not laxing.”

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basketball courts and any day-use areas prone to attracting crowds are closed.

The skate park will remain closed due to a lack of ability to maintain physical distancing at that park. Groups or parties in the parks are to be limited to groups of 10 or fewer that arrived together.

The city is not taking any reservations for park use through at least the end of September.

Parks are open, but all users must follow physical distancing requirements.

The restrooms in the parks will be open, but will not be cleaned twice daily. Visitors to parks should bring their own hand sanitizer with them to the parks.

The city reminds community members to continue to following public health guidelines:

- Stay home if you are sick.
- If you become symptomatic (cough, fever, shortness of breath) while in public, please return home and self-isolate immediately. Contact your health care provider if you need medical attention.

- Stay home if you are at-risk for severe complications: Individuals over the age of 60 or who have underlying medical conditions should stay home, even if well, to avoid exposure to COVID-19.
- Practice good hand hygiene: Frequently wash your hands for at least 20 seconds or use hand sanitizer (60-95 percent alcohol content).
- Cover coughs/sneezes with elbow or tissue: If you use a tissue, immediately

discard tissue in garbage and your wash hands.

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